



THE THREE WITCHES

The play opens with this scene of three horrible witches planning to meet in a terrible thunderstorm. It underlines the importance of the supernatural in the play and sets the scene for what is to follow.

1 Before you read, predict.

- a Where will the scene be set?
- b What might the witches be planning?



2 Read the text. Use the notes on the right.

THE THREE WITCHES

ACT I SCENE I

A desert place. *Thunder and lightning.*
Enter three WITCHES

FIRST WITCH

- 1 When shall we three meet again
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

SECOND WITCH

When the hurlyburly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.

THIRD WITCH

- 5 That will be ere the first of sun.

FIRST WITCH Where the place?

SECOND WITCH Upon the heath.

THIRD WITCH

That will be where Macbeth.

FIRST WITCH I come, Graymalkin!

- 10 SECOND WITCH Paddock calls.

THIRD WITCH Anon.

ALL Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
Hover through the fog and filthy air.
Exeunt.

The first witch asks the others when their next meeting will be and if it will be in stormy weather.

The second witch says they will meet when the noise and confusion of war is over and when the winners and losers of the battle have been decided.

The third witch says that will be before the end of the day.

The first witch asks where to meet. The second says they will meet on the heath (an open field). The third witch says they will meet Macbeth there.

Attendant spirits in the shape of animals call the witches. The first witch is called by a grey cat, the second by a toad. The third witch says she's coming soon, presumably to her animal spirit.

The witches chant their spell saying that what is beautiful is horrible and what is horrible is beautiful and that they will fly through the mist and the storm.

Understand and Analyse

UNDERSTAND

- 1 Where is the scene set and where will the next scene with the witches be set?
- 2 What do these places have in common and what effect does this create?
- 3 Which of the following are part of the witches' plans? Use the correct options.

a <input type="checkbox"/> to meet again soon	e <input type="checkbox"/> to go to the battle
b <input type="checkbox"/> to take part in the battle	f <input type="checkbox"/> to meet at night
c <input type="checkbox"/> to stop the war	g <input type="checkbox"/> to set a trap for Macbeth
d <input type="checkbox"/> to control the weather	h <input type="checkbox"/> to call their animals
- 4 Which other elements and imagery, apart from the witches themselves, add to the supernatural atmosphere?

ANALYSE

- 5 The way the witches speak adds to the sense of mystery. Find the following, add examples from the scene and explain the effect each one creates.

a Rhyming words

Examples:

.....

The effect of the rhyme

.....

b Use of opposites

Examples:

.....


The effect of the opposites

.....

THINK

- 6 In Shakespeare's times, many people believed in witches and many women were accused of witchcraft and executed. Given this information, think of how Elizabethan audiences would have reacted to this opening scene.

PRODUCE

- 7  How do you imagine a witch? In pairs, brainstorm words to describe witches then write a description.

Vocabulary Building

“A desert place,”

The natural world

1 Look at these pictures of the Scottish landscape.

a Describe what you can see.

b Which setting would you choose for the opening scene of *Macbeth*? Say why.



2 Complete the sentences with natural world vocabulary.

- a Geneva in Switzerland stands on the of a huge
- b The Amazon is one of the longest in the world.
- c The Mediterranean is a the Atlantic is an
- d The largest in the world is the Sahara.
- e Asia is a but China is
- f Many have died trying to climb Everest, the highest in the world.
- g Etna, which is on the Sicily, is an active
- h Although there is a mass at the south , the is entirely made up of

3 What's the correct preposition? Fill in the gaps.

- a When we flew to Florida, we flew the Atlantic. Florida is 5 hours London and 3 hours California.
- b The ship crossed the channel at its narrowest point.
- c The road goes all the way Loch Lomond.
- d Australia is the southern hemisphere while Indonesia is the equator.
- e Walk the river bank until you reach the farmhouse.
- f Death Valley in California is one of the hottest places Earth but the coldest place the world is in Antarctica.

4 Go to *Macbeth* online and do the vocabulary activity.

CULTURE

A Brief History of Scotland until the reign of James VI



Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* during the reign of James I, who was also James VI of Scotland. The play is, in fact, set in Scotland in the Middle Ages and out more about Scotland's history from ancient times to the 1600s.

Read the text and complete the tasks which follow.

Scotland has a long and colourful history. The first permanent settlements occurred during the Stone Age and archaeological sites, such as Skara Brae, show that the Orkney Islands were the centre of a sophisticated Neolithic people. However, we know little about them because there are no written records. The first records date back to the Roman invasion of present-day Scotland in AD 84. Legions under Agricola defeated the Caledonians and the Pictish tribes, the two tribes that lived in the area that is now Scotland, at the battle of Mons Graupius, in that year.

After the battle, the Romans retreated some distance and only the southern part of what is now Scotland was under Roman rule for a time. It was very difficult to keep control of a country that was mountainous, cold and full of violent, warlike tribes, and in 117 the Emperor Hadrian moved Roman soldiers even further south and built the famous Wall. It was designed to protect Roman Britain but it was also a barrier of economic and cultural exchange.

The Romans gradually abandoned Britain during the early fifth century and over the following three centuries Scotland moved to Christianity. The native Gaelic language was a focal point of unity and many of the various kingdoms had become one. In the same century the Vikings raided Scotland and many settled there.

Although the kingdoms were united, it was not peaceful. Many kings were either killed in battle or murdered by their own families. King Macbeth ruled in the eleventh century. The real Macbeth, however, was very different from Shakespeare's one. He was king for seventeen years and seems to have been a very good one. Nevertheless, he was one of many kings who were killed by a rival.

The following centuries were marked by wars with both Norway and England, but also led to greater Scottish unity. Finally, in 1328, Edward III of England acknowledged the independence of Scotland, and in 1371 the first Stewart king came to the throne. The Stewarts ruled Scotland until 1702.

James VI was born in 1566, the son of Mary, Queen of Scots. He never saw his mother as she was forced to abdicate when he was one year old. She fled to England and he never saw her again. Because of marriage alliances during the sixteenth century, James was next in line to the English throne, and, after the death of Elizabeth I, he became James I of England in 1603. Many of Shakespeare's most important plays were written during James I's reign.

1 Find these dates in the text and tell a partner what they refer to.

The Stone Age	AD 84	117	early 5th century
6th – 8th centuries	840	11th century	12th – 13th centuries
1328	1371	1371 – 1702	1603

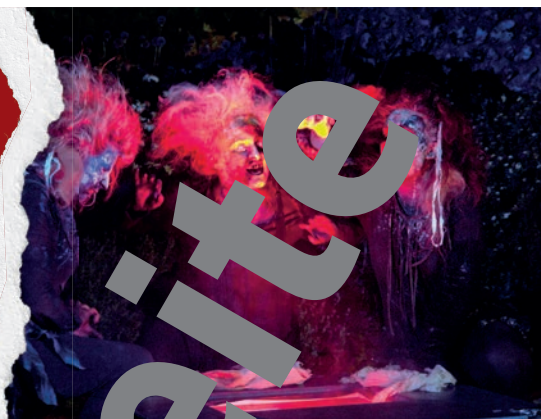
2 Find the name(s) of ...?

- a two ancient Scottish tribes
.....
- b the wall which marked the northern boundary of Roman Britain
.....
- c the native language of Scotland
.....
- d the most important Scottish royal family
.....
- e James I's mother
.....

INDEPENDENT LEARNING

- 3** Find out more about one of the subjects touched on in the text, such as Hadrian's Wall, Mary, Queen of Scots or the Gaelic language. Report back to your classmates.

From Reading to Performing



- 1 Before you listen, predict how the speech will be read. What kind of atmosphere needs to be created? Choose from the list and add some of your own.

magical	joyful	mysterious	dangerous	frightening	angry
evil	confusing	dramatic			

- 2   Listen and see if you were right. Discuss the tone used. Try for yourself. Read the script aloud with the recording and then without. Imitate reading speed, intonation and tone.

INTERPRETING A SCENE

When you set about interpreting and staging a scene you must have a clear idea of the function of that scene within the play as a whole. Based on this you must then decide what effect you want the scene to have on your audience.

In this case, we are working with the opening scene, which sets the mood for what is to follow.

Shakespeare left clear directions to the setting: *"A desert place. Thunder and lightning, Enter three WITCHES"*. The mood is dramatic, isolated and frightening. There is an immediate link created between the natural world (of the moor) and the supernatural (the witches). We are in a world of darkness and confusion, where anything is possible.

We learn a number of things:

- that the elements are in conflict;
- that there is a war or fighting underway;
- that the witches will meet Macbeth soon.


3 Discuss in groups of three or four students:

- a How would you recreate the setting?
- b How would you recreate the thunder and lightening?
- c How would you represent the witches (costume, make-up, voice and movement)?


ON STAGE!

One way of preparing for a dramatic scene is by working in groups to create a **still image**, or **tableau**, to convey the general meaning of the scene. This allows actors to concentrate on the feelings they want to convey and capture the mood.



- 4  In groups of four, create a silent tableau for this first extract. Then discuss what your tableau represented and whether it was effective or not.

WATCH AND PERFORM

- 5  Go to *Macbeth* online to watch a dramatization of the meeting of the witches and do the activities.